



DEMOCRATIC PRINCIPLES FOR THE REAUTHORIZATION OF THE ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION ACT

The **Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)** is a landmark law that reaffirmed the Supreme Court's decision in *Brown vs. Board of Education* that every child has the right to an equal opportunity for a quality education. As Congress prepares to rewrite the law, last reauthorized as **No Child Left Behind (NCLB)** in 2001, policymakers must not lose sight of the law's original guiding principle: equity in education for **all** of America's students.

Prior to NCLB, schools could receive federal funding while masking the academic performance of poor and minority students, students with disabilities, and English learners, thus subverting the goal of the law. NCLB provided detailed information about student achievement helping parents identify which students needed to be better served. NCLB's greater transparency and requirement that schools be identified for intervention and improvement have empowered parents and communities to hold their states, school districts, and schools accountable for the education of all children.

Everyone agrees the law needs to be updated and improved. Reauthorization presents a tremendous opportunity to advance our education system into the 21st century and ensure all students have access to a world-class education. A rewrite of NCLB must reflect the findings of current research and best practices that have been established over the last 14 years, on a range of issues, including school improvement, standards, teacher accountability, and protection of students' rights. To uphold the promise of ESEA, students must remain the focus of any reauthorization.

A successful reauthorization of ESEA requires a focus on the following key areas:

Guaranteeing all students have access to a world-class education regardless of background or zip code. Policymakers cannot forget the vital civil rights component of our nation's education law. We still have work to do as a nation to ensure that all children have access to a world-class education. Thanks to NCLB, we now know, and have evidence to show, that all students can learn and succeed despite their socioeconomic background. If we are to continue our progress toward equitable schools, access to timely and meaningful data on student outcomes such as growth, achievement, and graduation rates is necessary. Educators, parents, and communities must know how well schools are serving all students so we know when and where to target additional resources and interventions to improve student success.

Ensuring states set high standards and goals so that students graduate from high school college- and career-ready. Our national competitiveness relies on our schools preparing students for the 21st century workforce. Federal education policy must support states in this effort if we are going to successfully compete with workers and entrepreneurs from all over the world.

Giving states flexibility to craft their own research-backed accountability systems that are supportive, while holding schools accountable for all students. States and school districts should be empowered to improve schools. That empowerment comes with the ability to tailor improvement plans locally to meet the distinctive needs of individual students, schools, and communities. Whether it is by extending the school day, offering wraparound services, or supporting effective professional development for teachers, states and districts should be able to apply research-based solutions to address their particular needs. Accountability systems should focus on multiple measures of student learning and resource equity, and they should focus less on single test scores. These systems must be strong enough to continue identifying and supporting schools in need of improvement, with expectations on districts and states to meaningfully support improvement efforts. This is not to suggest that the federal government micromanage improvements to an individual school. However, Congress should require and support demonstrable action on behalf of students where willingness to act does not exist. School and student performance must continue to be transparent so parents and communities can participate in the implementation of research-based programs and policies to improve their schools.

Supporting teachers and school leaders. Teachers and school leaders should be empowered to do their jobs. They should have the information and resources they need to succeed—including compensation that accurately reflects their commitment to our greatest national resource, our students. Federal policy should support modern, locally-driven evaluation systems, developed in collaboration with both teachers and school leaders, to improve instruction and promote professional development. Teachers and school leaders also need access to targeted training, time to collaborate with one another, and working conditions that support student success.

Providing additional resources and improving access to those resources. Districts and schools are facing enormous economic challenges. Federal support is critical to maintaining continuity for schools in these difficult times. Unnecessarily complicated federal policies should not limit schools' and districts' access to available funds, and there is room for greater flexibility in how those funds are spent. But, we can provide this flexibility while strengthening oversight of public money. Taxpayers deserve to know that their dollars are being spent wisely in support of students.

The ESEA federal investment in K-12 education was designed to support schools and districts with high concentrations of poverty, providing them with desperately needed resources to supplement state and local dollars. Any reauthorization of the law must continue to target limited federal funds to our student populations most in need – poor, minority, and limited English proficient students, and students with disabilities. To ensure these students receive equitable resources, we must insist on the legal assurance that states and school districts maintain fiscal effort from one school year to the next.

Policymakers of both parties agree that changes are needed to our education law. But improvements to the law must reflect the core tenets of ESEA and ensure that our nation's system of public education offers an equal opportunity to all children. Every child in this country deserves a quality education, one that prepares them for lifelong success. We must come together in a bipartisan fashion to put our nation's children first.